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# INTRODUCTION

*Ted Kaizer*

The small fortress town of Dura-Europos is known, since the great Russian scholar Mikhaïl Rostovtzeff, as the ‘Pompeii of the Syrian desert’.<sup>1</sup> Situated on the Middle Euphrates river, it was founded as a Macedonian colony by one of the successors to Alexander the Great. Towards the end of the second century BC, Dura-Europos came under Parthian control and remained so - with a brief interruption during Trajan’s Parthian war - until it passed definitely under Roman rule in AD 165.<sup>2</sup> Nearly a century later, in ca AD 256, the defending Roman forces were defeated following a gruesome siege by the Sasanian army of Shapur I, who destroyed the town and left it to disappear under the sand.<sup>3</sup> By the time the emperor Julian the Apostate passed by the area during his ill-fated Persian campaign in the early 360s, Dura had long been deserted.<sup>4</sup>

## **The history of the exploration of Dura-Europos**

Before it had been identified as the town that Isidorus of Charax lists in his *Parthian Stations* as ‘Dura, city of Nikanor, a foundation of the Macedonians, called Europos by the Hellenes’,<sup>5</sup> the ruins at Salihyeh had been briefly noted in two late nineteenth-century travel reports, first by Engineer Josef Černík and then by John Punnett Peters, the

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase appears as the title of an article (‘la Pompei del deserto siriano’) in Rostovtzeff (1937). Cf. id. (1938a), p.2-5. But see already id. (1927), p.837, in a review of F. Cumont’s monograph: “I should not say that Dura is a Syrian Pompeii. Pompeii is unique and no other place can vie with Pompeii. However, in some respects Dura is a Syrian Pompeii. Like Pompeii it is primarily a Hellenistic city. Like Pompeii it shows the gradual absorption and modification of Hellenistic civilization by a non-Greek population.” Cumont took over the label in his correspondence with Rostovtzeff, in letters written from Rome on 29 October 1937 and 11 November 1938. Cf. Bongard-Levine e.a. (2007), n<sup>os</sup>129 and 140.

<sup>2</sup> On the Parthian phase, cf. Millar (1993), p.445-52, and id. (1998b); for the Roman period, cf. id. (1993), p.467-71, and Kaizer (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> For discussions of the date, cf. James (1985) and Macdonald (1986). James (2009-10) gives a convincing and graphic description, accompanied by clear and evocative illustrations, of the ‘chemical warfare’ that he argues must have taken place in one of the narrow tunnels dug under the wall. Cf. id. (2011a) and (2011b). Wahls (2007), p.101, put forward the hypothesis of a “Weiter-” or “Wiederbesiedlung” (‘re-settlement’) of Dura-Europos following its capture by the neo-Persians. Cf. now esp. Baird (2012b).

<sup>4</sup> Amm. Marc. 23.5.8 and 24.1.5.

<sup>5</sup> Isid. Char. *Mans. Parth.* 1: Δουῖρα, Νικάνορος πόλις, κτίσμα Μακεδόνων ὑπο δὲ Ἑλλήνων Εὐρώπος καλεῖται.

Director of the University of Pennsylvania Expedition to Babylonia, in whose time the site was known under the Turkish name of Kan Kalessi, ‘Bloody Castle’.<sup>6</sup> A lengthy description of “die namenlose Stadt” then followed as the fruit of four visits, between 1898 and 1912, by the team of Ernst Herzfeld, Friedrich Sarre and Bruno Schulz, but still no proper exploration took place.<sup>7</sup> This would finally change when British troops, camped at the ruins in March 1920, discovered the first fresco in what later came to be known as the temple ‘of the Palmyrene gods’. James Henry Breasted, the leading Orientalist scholar from the University of Chicago who by chance had just returned to Syria towards the end of April from an expedition to the Upper Tigris river, was instantly asked to undertake a mission to Salihyeh in order to examine the newly revealed paintings. Only five days later Breasted was on his way, with seven cars from the British Army and Civil Government. In the time frame of merely one day, he cleared the main mural, a large sacrificial scene now known as the Konon fresco [PLATE XIV], and found another painting in the adjacent room [PLATE II], with an accompanying inscription that enabled him to identify the ruins as those of Dura.<sup>8</sup>

Breasted’s report to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-lettres in Paris, in July 1922,<sup>9</sup> aroused such enthusiasm that the Academy decided to send their ‘associé étranger’ Franz Cumont to Salihyeh under the protection of French troops sent by General Gouraud in Beirut. Cumont spent two brief periods at the site: eleven days in November 1922 and just over a month one year later, resulting in two classic tomes (‘texte’ and ‘atlas’) of *Fouilles de Doura-Europos* that lie at the basis of all further

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<sup>6</sup> Von Schweiger-Lerchenfeld (1875), p.17-8, and Peters (1897), p.131-5.

<sup>7</sup> E. Herzfeld, in Sarre and Herzfeld (1920), p.386-95.

<sup>8</sup> The dangerous conditions in which Breasted and his team had to work in what was in fact a war zone, are brilliantly evoked in the classic report on the mission, Breasted (1924), the first volume of the new series *Publications by the Chicago Oriental Institute*. See now also Emberling and Teeter (2010), in a volume accompanying a recent exhibition at the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago (12 January - 29 August, 2010), esp. p.66-70. *Ibid.*, p.71, fig. 4.59, the famous colourised image of the Konon fresco (showing Breasted on the right in front of the fresco) is accompanied by the hitherto unknown original photograph behind the image, at fig. 4.58, which shows not only Breasted, but also a “turbaned figure”, probably a local workman, who was painted out in the colourised photo. Note that the subscript to the original photo (4.58) blunders by mixing up the mural with the equally famous fresco “showing the Roman tribune Julius Terentius offering incense to local gods”, which is of course the painting in the adjacent room (to which I refer in the main text)!

<sup>9</sup> Breasted (1922a). Cf. *id.* (1922b), which includes an additional note by F. Cumont, who had been shown the photos from Salihyeh during an earlier visit to America.

scholarly investigation.<sup>10</sup> He continued to work in the building with the frescos discovered by the British troops and excavated also elsewhere in the city, finding among other things Dura's Greek name, Europos, in a parchment. In a review of the book, Rostovtzeff expressed the hope that archaeological work could continue soon and that an affluent individual or institution recognising the value of the early finds would come forward to fund it.<sup>11</sup> His own university eventually answered the call, and ten now legendary seasons of campaigns jointly undertaken by Yale and the French Academy followed from 1928 onwards. Together Rostovtzeff and Cumont, who both arrived at the site on 14 April of that year for the official opening of the excavations, acted as the enterprise's scientific directors, with the field directorship filled respectively by Maurice Pillet for the first four seasons, then by Clark Hopkins during the years of greatest discoveries, and finally by Frank Brown for the last two spells.<sup>12</sup> But with the supply of funding discontinued in 1937, in the context of the threatening world crisis leading up to the Second World War,<sup>13</sup> and with the waning powers of the Russian and Belgian giants who had come to embody the exploration of the Euphrates fortress,<sup>14</sup> the golden years of Dura-Europos seemed to have gone forever.

In more recent years, however, the site has been 'rediscovered'. Since the early 1980s, and until the start of the current unrest in Syria, it has been the subject of further

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<sup>10</sup> Cumont (1926). In 1924, the political situation had deteriorated such that only a handful of French soldiers continued to excavate, but without proper archaeological supervision. A brief report by Lieutenant Delaplanche is included in *ibid.*, p.477-81. Cf. my historiographical introductions to the two volumes on Dura-Europos in the *Bibliotheca Cumontiana* of the Academia Belgica and the Belgian Historical Institute in Rome: *Scripta Maiora* XI, the republication of Cumont (1926), and *Scripta Minora* VII, a collection of ca fifty articles, notes and reviews on the site by Cumont.

<sup>11</sup> Rostovtzeff (1927), p.841. In a letter written on 14 February 1927, Cumont had asked Rostovtzeff to emphasise precisely this: "Vous me rendriez service si vous en disiez quelques mots dans une revue américaine et peut-être sera-ce pour vous une occasion d'insister sur la nécessité de poursuivre les fouilles" ('You would render me a great service if you were to write a few words about it in an American journal and perhaps this could provide an opportunity to insist on the necessity to continue the excavations'). Cf. Bongard-Levine e.a. (2007), n°12.

<sup>12</sup> The so-called 'preliminary reports' (*Rep.*) are in fact so much more than just that. The tenth, final season was never properly published, but see Matheson (1992) and ead. (1993). Only a number of the originally planned 'final reports' actually saw the light of day, but a badly needed volume on the epigraphic material is not amongst them. Hopkins (1979) presents the often captivating history of the site's discovery during these years, obviously with most emphasis on, and the most enjoyable insight stories from, those seasons in which he participated himself, either as assistant to Pillet or as field director himself.

<sup>13</sup> Movingly illustrated by the later part of the correspondence between Cumont and Rostovtzeff, cf. Bongard-Levine e.a. (2007).

<sup>14</sup> Cumont died in 1947; Rostovtzeff, who in a letter to C.B. Welles from 8 October 1946 (Bongard-Levine e.a. (2007), n°22, at p.341) complained to have become "a burden to everybody and a relief and support to nobody", died in 1952.

archaeological exploration by the Mission Franco-Syrienne de Europos Doura (MFSED), headed by Pierre Leriche, who not only initiated new excavations but also, even more importantly, focused his team's efforts on issues concerning analysis, survey and conservation (on which see also below).<sup>15</sup>

### **Dura-Europos: towards a case-study of 'small-town history'**

Several features coincide to make Dura-Europos into what is potentially our best source for day-to-day life in a small town situated in the periphery of the Graeco-Roman world. Inscriptions and graffiti combined with parchments and papyri have revealed at least ten ancient languages and dialects used in the town. Regardless of whether these were employed regularly or only occasionally, the linguistic variety is of course truly phenomenal. In addition to Greek (the dominant language in public documents) and Latin (above all associated with the imperial forces stationed at the site in the later phase), several Aramaic dialects are attested (including Palmyrenean, Hatrean and Syriac), from the synagogue comes testimony in Hebrew, Parthian and Middle-Persian, and throughout the town shreds of the North Arabian dialect known as Safaitic were found.<sup>16</sup> As regards the papyri, they include one of the most important dossiers of any military unit in the Roman world, connected as they are above all to the activities of the *cohors XX Palmyrenorum*.<sup>17</sup> Amongst the Dura papyri, the most famous one will no doubt be the so-called *Feriale Duranum*, whose traditional interpretation as a *military* calendar has recently come under scholarly scrutiny.<sup>18</sup> The documents from Dura are now supplemented by a hoard of papyri whose provenance is uncertain (although they certainly originate from the Middle Euphrates), appearing on the antiquarian market in

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<sup>15</sup> Thus far, five volumes of *DEÉ* have appeared, with the sixth volume published as *Europos-Doura, Varia*. The mission has been re-baptised as the Mission Franco-Syrienne de Europos Doura. Separate mention may be made of the work carried out in the temple of Zeus Megistos by S.B. Downey (most recently Downey (2012)) and the British Academy-funded survey, spearheaded by S. James, of the Roman military base and the adjacent areas of the town, both undertaken under the hospitable umbrella of the Mission Franco-Syrienne.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kaizer (2009a) and Gascou (2011) for an overview and discussion.

<sup>17</sup> The papyri are collected in a Final Report by Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959). On the cohort, cf. Kennedy (1994).

<sup>18</sup> The *Feriale Duranum* is Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959), n°54. Reeves (2004) has now questioned the long-established understanding of the document and proposes to view it as a festival list presented to Dura-Europos when the town was granted the status of a Roman *colonia*. Most recently on the calendar, cf. Gros Lambert (2009).

the 1980s.<sup>19</sup> Together they contain valuable information about the army's social activities, such as the purchasing of land by veterans or the sales of slaves by officers. The precise effects, however, of the military presence on the local and regional societies, and the exact degree of the soldiers' interaction with the civic component of Dura's population, is not always straightforward and remains the subject of intense debate.<sup>20</sup> As regards the economic life of Dura-Europos, it had long been assumed, since the days of Cumont, that the town had been in the first place a station in the long-distance trade due to its functioning as a connection point between Palmyra and the Persian Gulf. This view has been substantially adjusted in recent years, and more emphasis has been placed on the fact that many documents relate to the town's local economy.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, the countless sculptures and frescoes from Dura-Europos, among which are those that put the town under the spotlight of attention from scholars and the larger public alike, play their role in the ongoing debate on how best to characterise, and to understand, the prevalent form(s) of art in the Near Eastern frontier zone, especially popular (besides at Dura) at Hatra in the North-Mesopotamian Jazirah region and at Palmyra in the centre of the Syrian steppe, where it also developed into unique visual cultures. The particular artefacts from Dura similarly combine elements of Classical and Oriental spheres of influence, and the available material from the town is therefore of key importance to assess the 'nature of Syrian hellenism'.<sup>22</sup> Naturally linked with the sculpture,<sup>23</sup> it is probably above all the sheer amount of religious buildings (and the multifarious material linked with the respective cults that took place there) that allows an

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<sup>19</sup> The dossier from the Middle Euphrates is published by Feissel and Gascou (1995), (1997) - with Teixidor - and (2000). For discussion, cf. Gascou (1999), Gnoli (2000) and Mazza (2007). For the wider context, cf. Mazza (1992), and on the historical geography of the region cf. Gaborit and Leriche (1998).

<sup>20</sup> Dąbrowa (1981), Stoll (2001), and Pollard (2000), the latter arguing that the presence of the army in the Near Eastern provinces resulted more in exploitation than in investment. Cf. Gnoli (2007) and Edwell (2008).

<sup>21</sup> Dirven (1996) and ead. (1999), p.34-40. Cf. *ibid.*, p.6-8 and p.15-7, on Dura's local economy. Cf. esp. the contribution to this volume by K. Ruffing, with references to his earlier publications on the subject.

<sup>22</sup> The latter is the title of Sartre (2008). The debate on the so-called 'Parthian art', now widely acknowledged to be a misnomer, goes back to Rostovtzeff (1935). Cf. Drijvers (1990); Mathiesen (1992), I, p.78-80, and II, n<sup>os</sup>168-95. For a comprehensive catalogue and accompanying discussion, cf. Downey (1977), and now especially the contribution to this volume by L. Dirven. The numerous terracotta figurines, on the other hand, point to a culture much closer to that of Ancient Mesopotamia than to that of the Graeco-Roman world, cf. Downey (2003).

<sup>23</sup> Downey (2008).

above-average appreciation of the everyday life in an ancient small town:<sup>24</sup> more than a dozen pagan sanctuaries, including a mithraeum,<sup>25</sup> plus a famously painted synagogue and the earliest Christian house church, were all set in a rigorously grid-iron pattern, surrounded by well-preserved fortifications [PLATE I].<sup>26</sup>

Like Pompeii, its counterpart in the centre of the Roman world, the relevance of Dura-Europos for modern scholarship does not mirror the town's actual importance in the ancient world. Its marvellous findings facilitate the study of life in an ancient small town to a degree that archaeology and history do not usually allow. But unlike Pompeii, Dura-Europos has - primarily due to the presence of so many non-Classical languages, of the so-called 'Parthian art' and of the indigenous style of buildings - often been considered by modern historians of the Graeco-Roman world as 'exotic' and therefore peripheral to the study of Classical antiquity. Academic *and* public interest in the site has, above all, traditionally gone to the unique wall paintings from the synagogue,<sup>27</sup> and to a lesser degree to those from the church.<sup>28</sup> It is to be hoped that this volume will contribute to further appreciation of the fact that the stronghold on the Middle Euphrates would still be amongst our best test cases for many more aspects of the society and culture of a relatively minor locality situated on the fringes of the empire.

### **This volume and its contributions**

It will be obvious that this volume is not an attempt at a comprehensive overview of all aspects of religion, society and culture at Dura-Europos. Instead it presents a series of case-studies on individual aspects, and in this context it should be emphasised at the outset that as editor I have not attempted to enforce conformity throughout this tome beyond format. Possible disagreements amongst individual contributors to the volume, and indeed with views held by the editor (or vice versa), ought not to be considered as

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. Kaizer (2009b), serving as a *Vorstudien* to what I hope will become a monograph on the subject.

<sup>25</sup> On which see now the contribution to this volume by T. Gnoli.

<sup>26</sup> The most recent and accurate plan of the site, of the MFSED, has now been drawn by S. de Pontbriand, P. Leriche and H. David). Cf. Luciani and Boschiero (2010), p.85, ill.6. It is available separately as a 'plan guide du visiteur'.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the classic volume by Kraeling (1956); cf. Goodenough (1964) The bibliography on the synagogue is too long to do it justice here. Suffice it to refer here to Weitzmann and Kessler (1990). Cf. Sommer (2006b).

<sup>28</sup> Kraeling (1967). Amongst the most recent publications, cf. Pagoulatos (2007) and Korol (2009).

detrimental to this project; they rather illustrate that the study of Dura-Europos can advance successfully only in the context of constructive and open-minded debate. Thus, the building that was first discovered can be referred to according to the conventional scholarly labelling as either the temple ‘of the Palmyrene gods’ or that ‘of Bel’, although it has been argued recently that it would be better called, at least for the Parthian period, temple ‘of Zeus’;<sup>29</sup> as regards the fresco of the tribune Julius Terentius, some contributors would still leave the option open that the recipients of the depicted sacrifice were emperors, despite the editor’s own strong conviction that these figures must necessarily be Palmyrene gods;<sup>30</sup> others may adhere more to some of the traditional scholarly reconstructions of frescos than might now be considered desirable;<sup>31</sup> and whereas my own preference would be to think of the Euphrates stronghold as a town rather than a city - to distinguish it from the much more monumental appearance of a Palmyra, a Hatra or a Gerasa, this has not been imposed on individual authors either.

It should be noted, however, that (with one exception) throughout this volume the ‘traditional’ place name of Dura-Europos (often abbreviated to Dura) is adhered to, and I have decided not to follow the recent proposal by the Mission Franco-Syrienne to switch to ‘Europos(-)Dura’ instead (though I hasten to add that I speak for myself on this point and not necessarily for all contributors).<sup>32</sup> The Seleucid military colony of Europos, that by the end of the second century BC had developed into a town with a grid-iron plan enclosed by imposing ramparts, had been founded *ca.* 300 BC on a plateau that seems to have been known as Dura, meaning ‘fortress’, since time immemorial, according to a cuneiform tablet reused in a wall of the temple of Atargatis that refers to the ‘district of Dawara’.<sup>33</sup> The indigenous name became especially popular again in the early third century AD, but not at the cost of the Greek name, as is shown by a divorce act from AD 254, very shortly before the Sasanian conquest: in this document, the town (which by now had become a Roman *colonia*) was officially referred to as the *κολωνεία*

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<sup>29</sup> Independently argued by Millar (1998b), p.482, and Dirven (1999), p.293-5. Even more neutrally, it could be referred to as the temple ‘just north of block J3/5’ or, following the most recent map, the temple ‘in block J9’, cf. Luciani and Boschiero (2010), p.85, ill.6.

<sup>30</sup> Kaizer (2006). On the fresco, cf. now also Dirven (2007).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the important warnings given in the contribution by S.B. Downey to this volume.

<sup>32</sup> The exception is the contribution to this volume by S.B. Downey, who prefers to alternate between the two options.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Stephens (1937).



Εὐρωπαϊῶν Σελεύκου Νεικάτορος.<sup>34</sup> In the end, our labelling does not really matter: *both* ‘Dura-Europos’ *and* ‘Europos(-)Dura’ are modern hybrids. *Both* of the name’s halves were used in ancient times, often alongside each other contemporaneously. But as far as our evidence is concerned, they were only once mentioned together, namely by the above-mentioned Isidorus, who - from a Parthian perspective (he came from the Arsacid-dominated Gulf state Characene) - early in the first century AD listed the town in the first place as ‘Dura’, which he said was ‘called Europos by the Hellenes’ (*Mans. Parth.* 1: Δοῦρα ... ὑπο δὲ Ἑλλήνων Εὐρωπος καλεῖται). Since both combinations are scholarly creations anyway, I have opted to carry on using the same name that has by now become widely established and considered conventional.

It should therefore perhaps be stressed that in no way does this volume aims to challenge, nor should it be seen as rivalling, the indispensable work done and published by the Mission Franco-Syrienne. Among many other matters (including surveys and analyses, and also new excavations as such), Pierre Leriche concentrated in particular on the undertaking of measures that were intended to help to preserve the site for future generations, and for this scholars (as well as the public at large) owe him a huge debt. As anyone who has visited Salihyeh can testify, its ruins are extremely vulnerable. Having travelled along the Middle Euphrates both in the late 1990s and in 2010, I was shocked to see to what degree the once empty stretch to the south of Deir ez-Zor had been built up in the meantime - not to speak of the changes that have taken place, according to the available photographs, in the area since the days of the joint mission in the 1920s and 1930s! The deal that Leriche struck with the Syrian authorities, to have the immediate surroundings of Salihyeh protected by a law that prohibits further construction work within a specified radius, was therefore of the utmost importance. Any comparison of images from the Yale campaign with those taken in recent years reveals quite how fragile the remains of Dura-Europos are. The erosion of the monument is due in part to climatic factors, and in part to the human element. On the one hand, photos in the archives of the Yale University Art Gallery (YUAG) show, for example, how the temple of Artemis was flooded in the 1930s, similar to the state of the temple as it was when Leriche came across it in 1985 (according to his photograph on display in the exhibition house recently

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<sup>34</sup> Welles, Fink and Gilliam (1959), n°32.

built at the site itself, but destroyed during the recent unrest).<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, tourists wandering through the mostly unsupervised ruins added to the damage by climbing the low mud-brick walls of the buildings, and any unattentive visitor who noticed a large chunk breaking off under his feet would be glad not to have Maurice Pillet around, who is said to have shown a rather unforgiving attitude to Jotham Johnson when the latter “with inexcusable carelessness ... broke off a fragment” of the so-called battlement graffito, as a result of which he had “not been allowed to forget the incident”.<sup>36</sup> The damage that the site has undergone during the recent unrest in the region, above all through illicit excavations and plundering with a view to the black market, is too enormous, and too sad, to be described here in any detail.

A lot of exciting work is done also outside the Mission Franco-Syrienne, by established and young scholars alike, and it is to be hoped that the present collection of articles reflects some of this dynamic input into the scholarship of the subject, which does not necessarily depend on great familiarity following from site work, or even site visits. The material from the preliminary and final reports of the campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s is far from exhausted and deserves continuous reflection and re-studying. Part of this analysing work can of course only be done at Dura-Europos itself, and has indeed been done most admirably by the team of Leriche, but another part must be the responsibility for scholars from various disciplines labouring away in their libraries world-wide. This volume, then, is in the first place the result of an attempt to bring together as many scholars and students working on Dura-Europos, in order for them to share their understanding, questions and theories about this highly fascinating site. And it is very much hoped that, as such, it will further stimulate contacts and discussions between academics from different disciplines and backgrounds.

In contrast to the other papers in this volume, Leonardo Gregoratti’s contribution deals with the Dura-Europos of the Parthian period. He argues that this often neglected phase in the town’s history can only be properly understood when it is viewed in the context of the Parthian empire as a whole. He assumes that Dura was among the ‘other

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<sup>35</sup> Compare Klengel (1986), p.62, n°12, a photograph showing how, on the approach from outside, Dura’s walls are partly covered by the desert sand.

<sup>36</sup> From a letter by Johnson to Rostovtzeff, sent from Dura on 6 February 1929, now preserved in the YUAG archives. On the relationship between Pillet and Johnson in general, cf. Hopkins (1979), at p.52 and p.61.

cities of Macedonian foundation, carrying Greek names' which Tacitus (*Ann.* 6.41) sets in sharp contrast to Parthian settlements, and he puts forward the hypothesis that a process by which these cities developed under royal Arsacid influence – from relative urban self-rule into more restricted forms of administrative power – ought to be contrasted with the situation as Tacitus describes it for the major city of Seleucia on the Tigris, where the democratic element was preserved in the light of the King of King's advance.

Jennifer A. Baird's paper studies dress practices at Dura-Europos. Building on the archival records from the joint campaigns by Yale and the French Academy, in which she has found many unpublished artefacts, her investigation throws light on a usually neglected but obviously essential aspect of what daily life in a provincial small town on the fringes of the Roman empire was like. The paper makes important observations about the relative spread of 'elite culture' throughout the site, and about the varying degrees of 'Greekness' and 'Romanness' that can be attested in the evidence.

The article by Michael Sommer contains two case studies, of the famous murals in the synagogue of the Jewish diaspora community of Dura-Europos and of the role of women in some of the legal documents from the Middle Euphrates region respectively. Together they show the difficulties that modern scholars encounter when trying to make sense of what went on in cultural terms. Sommer discusses the relevant arsenal of methodological apparatus - ranging from acculturation to hybridity and 'créolité' - and considers the potential value in the application of these terms to the cultural diversity detectable in the monuments and documents from the fortress town on the Euphrates.<sup>37</sup>

Lucinda Dirven tackles the problem of Parthian art at Dura, first formulated by Rostovtzeff in his monograph-sized classic paper published in *Yale Classical Studies* from 1935. With scholars realising that the concept of an actual Parthian cultural centre must remain conjecture, 'Parthian art' has, in more recent years, come to be seen as a misnomer. Building on this, Dirven now pushes the argument even further, and makes the case that the alleged similarities in style (of which frontality is the one best known) shared by sculptures from Dura-Europos and other places in the region, above all Palmyra, Edessa and Hatra, have been exaggerated by scholars and should be disposed of

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<sup>37</sup> For a different approach, cf. now Andrade (2013), p.240.

too. Her re-evaluation of the figurative art of Dura leads her to suggest that, in the period before AD 165, the local sculpture in this small-town was influenced by art not from Mesopotamia but from Palmyra, and as such underwent much more western stimulus than has commonly been assumed.

Maura K. Heyn gives a new interpretation of a fresco from the temple ‘of the Palmyrene gods’ that is known since Cumont as the so-called ‘scène énigmatique’.<sup>38</sup> Focussing on the gesture of the figures that are represented, she evaluates previous scholarly interpretations and puts forward a bold new hypothesis that the painting instead depicts a particular scene known from Classical mythology. “L’interprétation de cette scène reste à trouver”, Cumont wrote back in 1923,<sup>39</sup> and it is hoped that Heyn’s proposition will stimulate other scholars to rediscover this intriguing mural and to further discuss its potential reading.

Jean-Baptiste Yon looks at the role of women in the town’s cults. As is well known, female names dominate the steps of the so-called ‘salles à gradins’ in the temples of Artemis, Atargatis and Azzanathkona, and Yon argues that this concerns only a certain trend within a limited period of time, and that the whole phenomenon ought to be interpreted within the wider context of the processes of monumentalization that the sanctuaries underwent.

Julian Buchmann draws attention to the multiple rooms in Dura’s sanctuaries that are furnished with benches and have traditionally been labelled in scholarship as ‘banqueting rooms’ for priests and other specific groups of local worshippers. He points to the problem that scholars have sometimes very freely handed out the tag ‘temple’ to these buildings and that this has seriously impacted the way in which rooms with benches are commonly understood to have functioned. Instead, their potential multi-functionality is emphasised.

Tommaso Gnoli puts forward a new interpretation of some components of the imagery on display in the mithraic ‘cave’, through a detailed examination of the two cult reliefs and the relevant frescos. He takes position against the new ‘orthodoxy’ adhered to by many modern scholars of mithraism, which has moved far away from the theories

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<sup>38</sup> Cumont (1926), p.84-9.

<sup>39</sup> Cumont (1923a), p.29; id. (1923b), p.52.

originally postulated by Franz Cumont, and argues that at least certain elements of the visual program of the Dura mithraeum would better be explained by reference to an Iranian sphere of influence.

Cristina Marta Acqua investigates how Rome's empire is present in the Euphrates small town. She catalogues the various monuments and their artefacts in both the military zone and the so-called civic centre, and proposes to view the relevant spaces in the context of so-called urban paths. What stands out from her contribution is the extent to which the notional power of the emperor is entrenched in the life of his subjects on the empire's fringes, although it remains of course to be seen to what degree the affirmation of Roman authority at a site like Dura result from any conscious decision on the part of Rome itself, especially in those parts of the town not dominated by military personnel.

Jacqueline Austin contributes a palaeographical perspective, which has in recent years been often neglected in the study of Dura-Europos. Her case-study of two Latin *dipinti* from Dura adds a number of pertinent observations to the scholarly discussion about the logistics of carving inscriptions in the Roman world, in particular about the involvement of those responsible for providing the outlines for the later engraving of texts. With regard to the military context of the town, it is emphasised that this process apparently took place without the aid of civilian clerks, and was hence taken care of 'in-house'.

Loren T. Stuckenbruck focuses on the Palmyrenean-Greek inscriptions from Dura-Europos and compares them with the much more substantial corpus of bilingual inscriptions from Palmyra itself, showing how the linguistic patterns at the Euphrates stronghold with regard to bilingualism are similar to those at the caravan city situated ca 200 km to the west. It is worth asking, however, whether 'Palmyrenean' is actually the correct label for the Aramaic inscriptions found at Dura. Of course, the link with the Palmyrene segment of Dura's population is sometimes made explicitly (when the author of the inscription identifies himself as a 'Palmyrene' or 'Tadmorene', e.g. *PAT* 1078) or implicitly (when a dedication is made to what are typically Palmyrene gods, e.g. *PAT* 1067), but most of the cases are less clear-cut and perhaps too easily taken for granted. Perhaps the language and its script that are commonly viewed as being related to the Palmyrenes should, as far as the evidence from Dura-Europos is concerned, be re-thought

one day as a more ‘regional’ dialect, in use not only by Palmyrenes but also by Durenes *and* by inhabitants from the villages along the Euphrates.

Kai Ruffing asks questions about the nature of the economic life of Dura under Roman occupation, and emphasises that the town ought to be studied in the first place in the context of the Middle Euphrates region, for which it formed a main regional centre (though I would hesitate to apply the label of metropolis in this case). The sources show how varying constituent groups of Durene society were economically active, though not - as far as the evidence is concerned - in any form of long-distance trade.<sup>40</sup> Ruffing also draws attention to the important role played by the variety of Roman soldiers and veterans, from both legionary detachments and auxiliary units, in the economic situation of Dura, from direct and active involvement to a mere stimulating function with regard to their fiscal *en bloc* power.

Susan B. Downey focuses on what she labels the ‘adventurous reconstruction’ both of buildings and of frescos by Frank Brown, field director at Dura-Europos for the final two seasons of the joint campaigns by Yale and the French Academy (1935-1937). She shows how Brown’s influential interpretations - of on the one hand the citadel palace and the temple of Zeus Megistos, and on the other the paintings in the so-called temples of Adonis and of Zeus Theos - were generally based on extremely flimsy evidence, and she calls for scholarly caution not to use his reconstructions as hard evidence.

Finally, Lisa R. Brody’s contribution constitutes an appropriate epilogue to this volume. It surveys the vicissitudes of some of the most famous finds from Dura-Europos since they were brought to New Haven in the 1930s, and describes in detail the technicalities of the various conservation processes being undertaken at Yale University. Finally, she clarifies the underlying principles of the new permanent exhibition of the Dura material that has now opened in the completely refurbished YUAG, and that will - together with a number of scientific innovations - play a major role in the upgraded accessibility of the artefacts from the Euphrates town.

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<sup>40</sup> Pierre Leriche was kind enough to point out to me, during a very pleasant visit to the site on 30 March 2010, that the archaeological evidence makes quite clear that Roman Dura was *not* “dying before the Sasanians killed it” - as Rostovtzeff (1938a), p.31, had claimed - but that there is indeed abundant evidence for workshops and commercial activities, e.g. ovens for pottery and manufacturing facilities.

### Dura-Europos in the public eye

Even if the days are long gone that A-list celebrities such as Agatha Christie visited the site,<sup>41</sup> or Eugenio cardinal Pacelli (the future pope Pius XII) came to listen to Rostovtzeff's lecture on the frescos from the Christian building,<sup>42</sup> it is clear that in recent years Dura-Europos has gradually crawled back into the public eye. The ongoing work of the Mission Franco-Syrienne has of course played a key role in this context, but so have the graceful efforts by Susan Matheson and her team to make the archival material at the YUAG available to any senior or junior scholar who wants to benefit from it. In addition, expositions of the finds have been upgraded substantially in recent years. Following an exhibition of the Dura material preserved at Yale at the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College (in spring 2011)<sup>43</sup> and another one at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University (in late 2011 and early 2012)<sup>44</sup>, it is now on display permanently at New Haven itself in the refurbished YUAG.<sup>45</sup> In Paris, the finds from Cumont's campaigns in 1922 and 1923 share a room with Palmyrene sculptures.<sup>46</sup> As for Syria, the presentation of the outstanding collections of the National Museum of Damascus was being completely modernised shortly before the outbreak of the current unrest, with one of its main pieces, the famous Konon fresco that sparked Dura's exploration after its discovery by British soldiers in 1920, having undergone essential

<sup>41</sup> Agatha Christie is said to have visited Dura together with her husband, the Near Eastern archaeologist Max Mallowan, on 8 November 1934. Cf. Hopkins (1979), p.214-5. Christie herself said the following about it in Christie Mallowan (1983), p.40: "In the afternoon we go to visit the American dig at Doura. It is a pleasant visit, and they are charming to us. Yet I find my interest in the finds flagging, and an increasing difficulty in listening or in taking part in the conversation." In his own memoirs, Mallowan (1977), p.101-9, did not mention a visit to Dura in the context of his survey of the Habur valley in November and December 1934, though he describes their visit to Palmyra at the outset of that trip. Note how, in a letter to the President of Yale University, J.R. Angell, sent from Dura-Europos on 6 February 1934, Rostovtzeff wrote: "Dura is very popular in Syria. We have frequent visits of French officers, American residents in Syria and other distinguished people. Dura certainly will become a centre of international tourism." Cf. Bongard-Levine e.a. (2007), n°13, at p.323.

<sup>42</sup> In a letter of 23 July 1932, Rostovtzeff told Cumont about his address to the Pontificia Accademia di Archeologia in Rome on the most recent discoveries at Dura: "Grande était la surprise du Président quand soudainement le grand Cardinal Pacelli a fait son entrée inattendue. Alors ma conférence dans les yeux de la salle devint vraiment intéressante" ('Great was the surprise of the president [of the Pontifical Academy] when suddenly the great Cardinal Pacelli made his unexpected entry; therefore my presentation became truly interesting according to those attending'). Cf. Bongard-Levine e.a. (2007), n°94.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. the catalogue by Brody and Hoffman (2011).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. the papers in Chi and Heath (2011).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the contribution to this volume by L.R. Brody.

<sup>46</sup> However, unlike those of Palmyra, the items from Dura-Europos were not reckoned worthy of a separate catalogue. Cf. Caubet (1990), p.88-102, including a rare photograph of Cumont at the site with two French officers, from the collection of Capitaine Jumaucourt.

restoration by the team of Pierre Leriche. In the vicinity of Dura itself, the local Museum at Deir-ez Zor, which also had some important items on display, opened its doors in April 1996.<sup>47</sup> Last but not least, the Fondazione Benetton, Studi e Ricerche (Treviso) awarded Dura-Europos the 21<sup>st</sup> International Carlo Scarpa Prize for Gardens [*sic*] 2010, including a photographic exhibition of the site, a public seminar, a public ceremony and publication of a dossier dedicated to the site.<sup>48</sup> The further exploration of the potential of Dura-Europos for enhancing our understanding of virtually all aspects of history in the Parthian and Roman period is still in its infancy, but it is hoped that this collection of papers will be able to contribute to granting the town its rightful place in the centre of modern scholarship on the Graeco-Roman world.

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<sup>47</sup> The main piece is a relief from a small sanctuary excavated by the Mission Franco-Syrienne, cf. Bounni (1994), and the catalogue by Bonatz, Kühne and Mahmoud (1998), p.142-3. The museum also shows copies (with the painter's signature reading 'Orangotango 96'!) of the murals of the temple 'of the Palmyrene gods', interestingly attempting to follow their original locations on the wall, though unfortunately turning *naos* and *pronaos* into one! Cf. *ibid.*, p.138-41. Finally, the little altar with its famous dedication to Zeus Betylos had been transferred (back) to the Euphrates from the National Museum of Damascus, certainly by April 1997 (when I first visited Deir ez-Zor). This is of course the very monument with which Millar (1993), p.1, famously opens, recalling a visit to the National Museum in 1986, when the altar was still at Damascus.

<sup>48</sup> Luciani and Boschiero (2010), simultaneously published in English and Italian versions. For more information, cf. <http://www.fbsr.it/>.